Posted: _____

U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Kremmling Field Office
P.O. Box 68
Kremmling, CO 80459

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

NUMBER: DOI-BLM-CO-120-2009-0058-EA

PROJECT NAME: Parsons Draw Sanitation Harvest & Pre-Commercial Thinning

LEGAL DESCRIPTION: 11 N., R. 81 W., Sections 13, 23 and 24

KREMMLING FIELD OFFICE, KREMMLING, COLORADO

CASEFILE/PROJECT NUMBER:

APPLICANT: BLM

PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE ACTION: An analysis of the existing condition in the Parsons Draw project area has determined that there is a need to salvage beetle-killed, lodgepole pine trees before most are on-the-ground; and reduce stand densities in regenerated stands. The primary purpose of the project would be to reduce beetle populations, remove accumulating fuels and promote regeneration in the sanitation/salvage units; and to improve health and vigor in young, regenerated stands.

Background/Introduction/Issues and Concerns: Recent years have seen a dramatic increase in bark beetle activity and conifer tree mortality in and around the area of Parsons Draw. Recent reconnaissance has found that the mature and over-mature lodgepole pine stands have experienced severe mountain pine beetle (MPB) infestation and mortality with approximately 85-95% of trees greater than 7 inches DBH (Diameter Breast Height) currently infested or dead. Smaller diameter trees have been killed, as well, and continue to be attacked, primarily due to their proximity to larger, beetle-infested trees. Spruce beetle and fir decline, continue to cause sporadic mortality in the spruce/fir component of these lodgepole pine stands. Several insect and disease agents are associated with fir decline induced mortality.

A published literature review indicates that lodgepole pine trees killed by MPB in previously unmanaged stands begin falling approximately 5 years after death and most dead trees are on the ground within 14 years (Lewis and Hartley, 2006). Fuel loading would increase dramatically in a stand once most of the beetle-killed pine is on-the-ground.

Several regenerated harvest units exhibit excessive stand densities and some level of dwarf mistletoe infestation. Reducing stand densities coincident with removing dwarf mistletoe infested saplings would improve the health of the stands.

This project is part of a larger fuels treatment and timber management effort, in which similar projects went through a public review process in November of 2007. The Decision Memorandum (DM) for the Independence Mountain/Parsons Draw/Fischer Draw Fuels Treatment Projects (CO-120-2007-19-CX) was signed on March 19, 2008. In part, this DM authorized the use of prescribed fire, hand and mechanical treatments to reduce the density of both live and dead lodgepole pine and aspen trees. These treatments would be implemented on BLM administered lands in the Independence Mountain area of Jackson County, Colorado, located in: T. 11 N., R. 81 W., Sections 2, 3, 9-15 and 23-25; and T. 11 N., R. 80 W., Sections 19 and 29-32. The total project area covered in this DM is approximately 4,210 acres, treating up to 3,000 acres through prescribed burning and 1,000 acres through mechanical or hand thinning.

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES:

Proposed Action: The BLM is proposing to use mechanical treatments to harvest dead, currently infested, and beetle/disease susceptible trees in two units totaling approximately 215 acres. Trees that are likely to be wind-thrown soon after harvest, if left standing, would be harvested as well (mostly large subalpine fir). Smaller diameter lodgepole pine and other conifer trees, as well as aspen, would be retained where feasible.

To facilitate harvest, it is estimated that a little less than 0.5 miles of temporary road may be constructed to decrease skidding distances. Temporary road locations would be approved by the BLM prior to development. After harvest operations, temporary roads would be outsloped, and roads and landings would be scarified, as necessary. Temporary roads, landings and, as necessary, major skid trails, would be seeded with a BLM approved mixture of forbs and grasses by the Purchaser. Temporary roads, or portions thereof, would also be slashed in. Post harvest treatment in the two sanitation units would include a release and weed/thinning treatment of the smaller diameter trees in the residual stand.

About 85 acres of 25 year old lodgepole pine would be pre-commercially thinned to reduce stand densities and improve stand health.

The proposed action would most likely be accomplished through the North Park Stewardship Agreement, although a commercial sale contract(s), or a stand-alone stewardship contract(s), could also be used. Some of the activities could also be completed through a service contract(s), and/or by force account. It is anticipated that the activities described in the proposed action would be completed in 3-4 years.

The North Park Stewardship Agreement between the BLM and Jackson County, Colorado was signed on September 18, 2007. The objective(s) of the agreement is to implement a multi-year stewardship project for the cooperative management of natural resources within Jackson County, CO, to restore forest health and accomplish community resource management objectives on or near forested lands managed by the BLM.

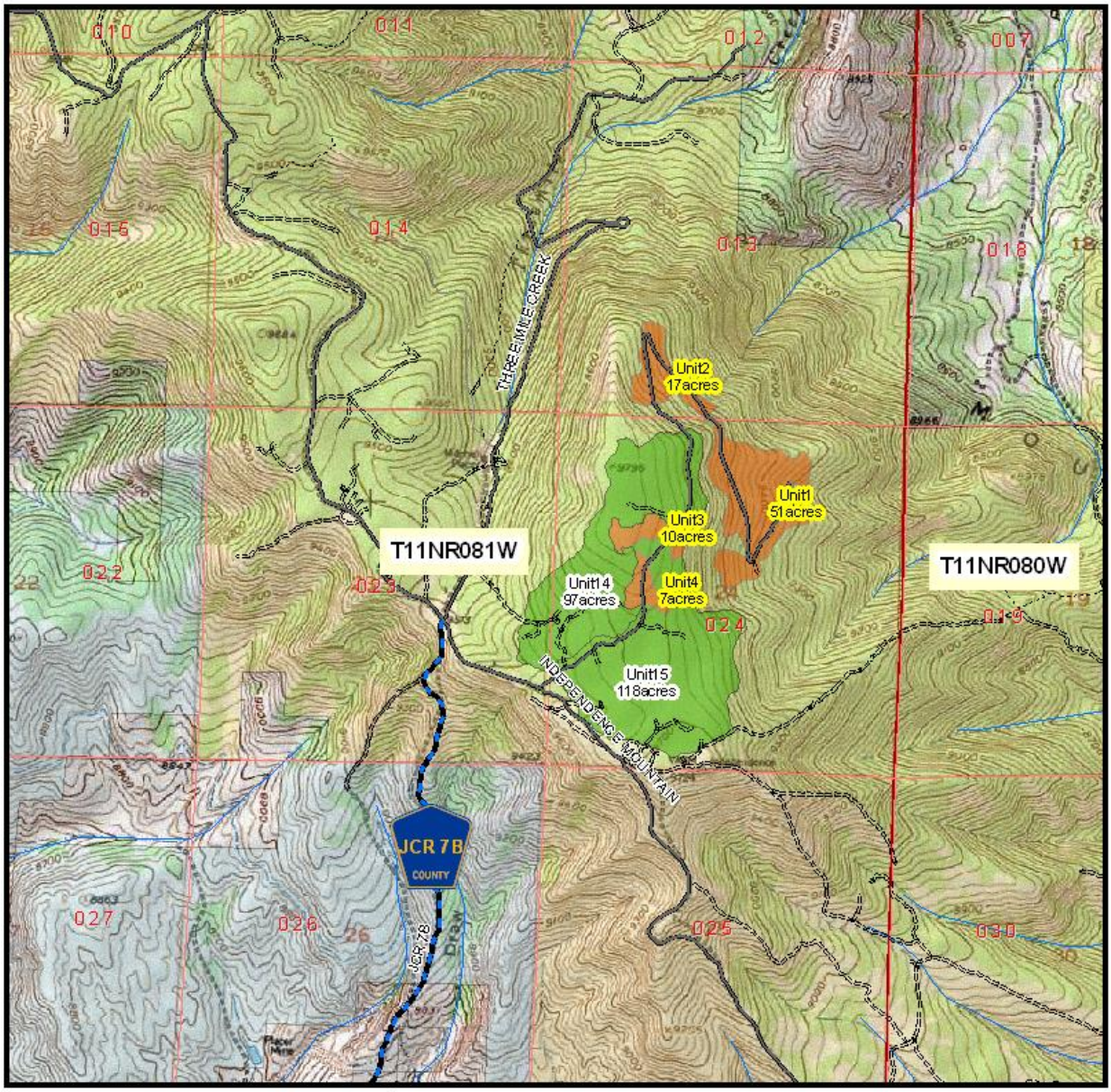
Design Features of the Proposed Action:

- The treatments would be implemented with conventional, ground-based logging equipment to cut all dead, currently infested, and beetle/disease susceptible lodgepole pine and other conifer trees. Trees that are likely to be windthrown soon after harvest, if left standing, would be harvested as well (mostly large subalpine fir). Specifically, lodgepole pine that are 7 inches or greater DBH (Diameter Breast Height), and subalpine fir and Engelmann spruce that are 9 inches or greater DBH, would be designated for removal. Healthy lodgepole pine that are 6 inches DBH or less, all aspen, and subalpine fir and Engelmann spruce that are 8 inches DBH or less, would be reserved.
- Recent experience with other salvage sales of beetle-killed trees has identified that the traditional lop and scatter method of slash disposal is not as effective in adequately treating slash as it has been in the past. Decreases in tree moisture content following death results in the development of checks (ie, cracks) in the wood. Checking reduces wood utilization, especially in smaller diameter logs because they are more likely to fall apart when going through the mill. Multiple checks in the smaller logs and tops are resulting in large quantities of this material being left on site. To more effectively utilize this material, otherwise sound cull logs and larger diameter tops would be offered for sale as biomass or, alternatively, decked onsite for later disposal. Remaining slash may be disposed of by lop and scatter, broadcast burning, piling for later burning, or through a combination of the above methods. Some slash would be left onsite to provide soil protection. Slash generated through pre-commercial thinning treatments would be treated in a similar fashion. Piles would be burned during the winter by the BLM when adequate snow depth and burning permit conditions are present.
- The BLM would monitor disturbed areas for noxious weeds for two growing seasons after the project is completed. Noxious weed control, if needed, would be coordinated by the BLM.
- Wetland and riparian vegetation would have a 100-foot buffer from disturbance to protect water quality.
- Survey monuments (brass cap monuments, bearing trees, mineral claim posts, etc.) would be located, flagged and protected.
- Improvements in the project area would be protected. As per Sec. 14 of the contract, "Damage to…improvements shall be promptly paid for or repaired (by the Purchaser) to a condition which…is at least as good as the condition just prior to such damage". This includes a fence that runs along a short section of the southern boundary of Unit 15, as well as a gate located on the road that bisects the project area.
- During periods of livestock use the timber contractor must close all gates to ensure livestock stay within permitted pastures.
- The 1988 Off Road Vehicle Implementation Plan Record of Decision closed Parson's Draw Road No. 2513 year round to prevent road damage and provide big game security. The contractor would be responsible to ensure the gate is closed and locked at times when work is not occurring and ensure the public does not utilize the road by motorized vehicles during operations.
- Temporary roads or harvest areas that would create new access points to Parson's Draw Road No 2513 would be required to have fencing and no motorized vehicle signage to prevent motorized vehicle access and the proliferation of new routes in the project area.

The existing routes that are currently open would remain as such until Travel Management decisions are made within the Resource Management Plan revision.

- Hazardous tree removal would be conducted adjacent to the structure under the supervision of the Fire Archaeologist to avoid damage to the log cabin structure.
- During operation, signage would be placed on the existing routes leading to the project area informing visitors when operations are occurring. Visitors to BLM administered lands could then choose to utilize other areas during salvage operations.

Parsons Draw Sanitation Harvest and Thinning Project



0 0.1 0.2 0.4 0.6 0.8 1 Miles

No Warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management as to the Accuracy, Reliability, or Completeness of this Data for Individual Use of Aggregate Use with Other Data.

TAdamson July 15, 2009
T:\gisuser\Forestry\JacksonCountyStewardship\CAT_EX.mxd

1:24,000

Legend

- Jackson County Road
- Section

Treatment Units

Type

- Pre-Commercial Thinning
- Sanitation Harvest Units

Land Status

- Bureau of Land Mgt
- Private
- State

No Action Alternative: Mechanical treatments to harvest dead, currently infested, and beetle/disease susceptible trees, as well as associated actions such as temporary road construction, would not occur. Dense stands of young, regenerated lodgepole pine would not be thinned.

PLAN CONFORMANCE REVIEW: The Proposed Action is subject to and has been reviewed for conformance with the following plan (43 CFR 1610.5, BLM 1617.3):

Name of Plan: Kremmling Resource Management Plan (RMP), Record of Decision (ROD)

Date Approved: December 19, 1984; Updated February 1999

Decision Number/Page: p.10, 6.a.

Decision Language: To manage all productive forest land that is suitable for producing a variety of forest products on a sustained yield basis. This action will create a healthy forest environment through continued forest management practices.

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT / ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES / MITIGATION MEASURES:

CULTURAL RESOURCES

Affected Environment: Two cultural inventories (CR-07-23 and CR-09-48) have been conducted in the area for commercial timber harvest and fuels reduction using mechanical treatment and prescribed fire. Report CR-07-23, located and evaluated two historic sites located within the proposed action and they are sites 5JA817 and 5JA1764.

Environmental Consequences: The proposed action would be a no effect to sites 5JA817 and 5JA1764 which have been determined not eligible to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). There are no historic properties that would be affected by the proposed action. Site 5JA1764, consists of an area 2.2 acres that has a concentration of surface and vertical mining shafts. Though the area of site 5JA1764 is not considered to be significant the area should be approached with caution because of open mine pits and shafts.

Mitigation: None

INVASIVE, NON-NATIVE SPECIES

Affected Environment: There are known invasive, non-native species (weeds) within the project area. Weed populations have been found in past clear-cuts in these areas on Independence Mountain.

Environmental Consequences: Any soil disturbing activity (e.g. salvage operations) increases the chance of weed establishment and spread. Since the BLM is proposing to build temporary

landings and roads there is a potential for invasive weeds to spread. Monitoring and treatment of invasive plants will be coordinated through the BLM as part of the proposed action.

Mitigation: none

MIGRATORY BIRDS

Affected Environment: The proposed project area supports a number of migratory bird species including red-tailed hawks, Clark's nutcrackers, gray jays, Steller's jays, Townsend's solitaires, ruby-crowned kinglets, hermit thrushes, pine siskins, and dark-eyed juncos. Few ground nesting birds inhabit the project area due to the lack of ground vegetation. The closed canopy existing in the project area has prevented grass, forb, and shrub establishment which would provide food and nesting cover for ground nesting species.

Environmental Consequences: Migratory birds inhabiting the proposed project area would likely be temporarily displaced from the area during timber harvest activities. Some nest trees could be removed by the proposed project, however, a sufficient number of trees in the Independence Mountain area would remain after harvest to provide nesting habitat for tree nesting birds. The proposed project could benefit some ground nesting species since the proposed project would open the forest canopy and allow grasses, forbs, and shrubs to establish. Additional food and cover for ground nesting species would be added to the treated areas by tree removal.

The No Action Alternative would not change the structure of the vegetation in the project area and would make the area more susceptible to fire since lodgepole pine trees would continue to die. This could result in a long-term change in the habitat which could adversely impact some tree nesting species since a fire would likely remove more trees than the proposed harvest project. With No Action, ground vegetation would decrease in the closed canopy forest habitat and could continue to preclude some migratory bird use of the proposed project area.

Mitigation: None

THREATENED, ENDANGERED, AND SENSITIVE SPECIES (includes a finding on Standard 4)

Affected Environment: A list of threatened, endangered, and candidate species which could inhabit the proposed project area was received from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on September 18, 2007. Analysis of this list indicated that no listed species would be impacted by the proposed project.

Northern goshawks, a BLM designated Sensitive Species, are likely summer residents of the proposed project area. During the summer of 2007, surveys were conducted that resulted in finding one inactive nest in the proposed timber sale units and one adult goshawk observed adjacent to the project area. No active nest sites were located. The project area supports birds and mammals which would be preyed on by goshawks.

Environmental Consequences: Goshawks migrate from the area in fall and do not return until early summer. Harvest activities during the spring/summer would likely cause direct impacts by disrupting active nest sites and causing nest abandonment. Indirect impacts would

include opening of the forest canopy which could improve habitat conditions for species utilized as prey by goshawks. In addition, the prey base for goshawks could increase as a result of the proposed timber salvage project.

Mitigation:

- If an active goshawk nest is located within the project area, an eighth mile buffer around the nest site would be required.

The No Action Alternative would not change the structure of the vegetation in the project area and would make the area more susceptible to fire since lodgepole pine trees would continue to die. This could result in a long-term change in the habitat which could adversely impact goshawks since a fire would likely remove more trees than the proposed harvest project.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for Threatened & Endangered species: Currently, the area is meeting land health standards. The Proposed Action would not hinder the area's ability to continue to meet Standard 4. Under the No Action Alternative, there is an increased potential for wildfire, which may affect the standard depending upon its severity and extent.

WATER QUALITY, SURFACE AND GROUND (includes a finding on Standard 5)

Affected Environment: The Project is within the Upper North Platte River basin, and is at the headwaters of the 5th order watershed `North Platte River below 3 Way'. Units 14, 15, 3, and 4 are located on nearly flat to gently sloping ground and being at a watershed divide, receive no runoff from higher areas. Their slopes are mostly 10% or less, with some steeper acreage just outside of the units. Units 1-2 are steeper and receive runoff from the other units. Unit 2's steeper acreages are located in the most southeastern portion of the unit, with about one acre with slopes greater than 25%. Unit 1 tends to be steeper on the west side of the access road, with about 3 acres steeper than 25%. The 3 acres in Unit 1 tend to be steeper than 35% slopes.

There are few defined drainages actually within the units and they are tributary to primarily ephemeral and a few intermittent drainages. Named drainages that could receive runoff from the units are Threemile Creek which is tributary to Hunter Reservoir and Parsons Draw, which ultimately reaches the North Platte River. Threemile Creek, Parsons Draw, and this segment of the North Platte River are considered to be fully supporting their designated uses and do not have identified water quality concerns.

Environmental Consequences: Timber harvesting involves ground disturbances from skidding and temporary roads. This can result in increased sediment yields to drainages, degrading water quality. Due to the gentle slopes, distance to perennial drainages, and soil infiltration rates, there will not be increased sediment loading in streams from Units 14, 15, 3, and 4. Due to the high tree mortality in the units, water yield and chemistry changes will occur regardless of timber harvesting or not. The Proposed Action involves only thinning Units 1 and 2 using chainsaws and existing roads. This basically eliminates ground disturbance and also leaves standing vegetation, making sediment loading from these units to downstream drainages unlikely. Under the No Action Alternative, the dead trees increase the wildfire risk. Wildfires

with intense temperatures can also remove the understory and litter layers, increasing erosion and water chemistry changes.

Mitigation: none

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for water quality: The Proposed Units occur in areas considered to be meeting the Standard for water quality. The Proposed Action will not affect the water quality or the area's ability to continue to meet the Standard. The No Action Alternative increases the risk of wildfires, which can degrade water quality depending on the size and intensity of the fire.

SOILS (includes a finding on Standard 1)

Affected Environment: The soils within the units are mapped as being Peeler sandy loams by the Natural Resource Conservation Service. Peeler sandy loams are formed in old alluvium and are generally located in the southwest portion of North Park. They are described as having a very dark brown surface layer below an organic mat layer. Due to the observed light soil color and the surface deposits of quartz, this appears to be a mapping error or a soil unit smaller than the mapped degree of detail.

The more generalized soil map shows the Independence Mountain area as being Grimstone-Agneston-Bowen association, which are also gravelly sandy loams to sandy loams that formed in material weathered from mica, schist, granite, and gneiss. Peeler soils can occur within this association (in fact other soils, including Peeler, make up about 40% of the association). The representative profile in fact for the Peeler sandy loam is in T. 11 N., R. 81 W., sec. 14. Since on site soil mapping was not done, both soil descriptions, limitations and characteristics of the Peeler sandy loam and the Agneston gravelly coarse sandy loam were considered for this Environmental Assessment. Agneston soils formed in material weathered from granite while the other soils tend to form in weathered mica, which has not been observed in the units.

The Peeler and Agneston soils are considered to be moderate to well suited for harvest equipment operability and have moderate limitations for hauling roads and log landings. Limitations are generally tied to slopes. They have moderate potential for ruts due to low strength and poorly suited for roads due to slopes. Agneston soils have high potential and Peeler soils have moderate potential for fire damage due to their textures/rock fragments if a fire removes the duff layer. Permeability is moderate, and runoff is slow to medium, with moderate to high hazard of water erosion, depending on the slopes.

Environmental Consequences: The soils tend to have a fairly coarse texture and are protected by a good duff layer. The proposed logging will result in less compaction from vehicles and equipment than finer textured soils. The coarse texture, however, results in lower soil cohesion and strength. Temporary roads and skid trails should avoid slopes above 25% to reduce rutting and water erosion. Due to the overall gentle slopes in the units, these avoidances affect very small areas of the units. Logging operations should only occur during dry soil conditions (ruts less than 2 inches) or when adequate snow layers protect the soils.

Under the No Action Alternative, the wildfire risk would continue to increase due to the amount of timber mortality. If wildfires were to occur, the coarse textured soils tend to have higher soil temperatures once the duff layer is consumed, reducing the nutrients and biotic communities. The amount of soil damage and soil erosion could vary greatly, depending on the fire's intensity, location, and acreage burned.

Mitigation: Vehicle and equipment avoidance of slopes greater than 25% and ceasing their operations during wet soil conditions will help protect soil resources.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for upland soils: The Proposed Action is located within an area that is considered to be meeting the Standard for upland soil health. The Proposed Action will disturb soils during harvesting by equipment operations and temporary roads, but on a landscape scale, will impact only a small portion of the area. Haul roads are already in place, reducing the amount of soil impact in the area also. The Proposed Action will not affect the soils' ability to continue to meet the Standard. The No Action Alternative increases the risk of wildfire increasing soil loss in the area, which could impact long-term soil health and sustainability.

VEGETATION (includes a finding on Standard 3)

Affected Environment: Most forest stands in the area are primarily comprised of mature and over-mature lodgepole pine, although there are some aspen stands, as well. Lodgepole pine stands in the area have serotinous cones. In other words, cones may remain on the tree without opening for one or more years. Cones open and seeds are shed when heat is provided by fires or hot and dry conditions. Many of the lodgepole pine stands also contain minor amounts of other species such as subalpine fir, aspen, and Engelmann spruce. For the most part, younger stands are confined to previously harvested areas.

The two units identified for sanitation harvest in the proposed action are typical of the mature and over-mature lodgepole pine stands in the area. Larger diameter (7 inches DBH and greater) mature and over-mature lodgepole pine make-up the vast majority of trees in these stands. There are, however, areas of mixed species, mixed size-classes, or both, within the units. Like other mature and over-mature lodgepole pine stands in the area, the trees in these units have been heavily infested with MPB with rates of mortality similar to those discussed in the purpose and need identified for this analysis. A combination of green trees (many are presently infested but there are some that have not been successfully attacked), red-needled trees (recently dead) and older dead trees (with few or no needles), currently exist within proposed treatment units. Spruce beetle and fir decline are also evident within the units. In addition to the incidental post/pole cutting and firewood gathering that has occurred over the years, about 32 acres within the two units were commercially thinned in 1987. Lodgepole pine has regenerated under the residual overstory in these previously thinned areas and the young trees are around 15 to 20 years of age.

The precommercial thinning units were clearcut in the early 1980's. These regenerated stands are approximately 25 years old and are mainly comprised of lodgepole pine, although other species occur as well. Dwarf mistletoe infestation is present in these regenerated stands, mostly along the edges adjacent to mature stands. Most trees exhibit only light infestations of the parasite. The number of stems per acre varies considerably both within, and between, regenerated stands. A review of recently completed monitoring data reveals that stand densities range from a little over 800, to nearly 1700, lodgepole pine stems per acre.

Environmental Consequences: Under the Proposed Action, lodgepole pine, 7 inches and greater DBH, would be cut within the sanitation harvest units. Subalpine fir and Engelmann spruce with a DBH of 9 inches and greater would also be harvested. Within these units, the harvest of beetle-killed pine would facilitate successful stand regeneration by exposing bare mineral soil and allowing more sunlight to penetrate to the forest floor. Harvest practices would result in cones being distributed over the site, in close proximity to mineral soil where high surface temperatures would open the cones. Seed germination in mineral soil increases chances of seedling survival because seedlings are better able to withstand dry conditions. Salvage harvest would also promote aspen suckering in areas where aspen currently exist.

Current fire hazard of a potential crown fire would be reduced within the units as aerial fuels would be reduced. Surface fuel loading would increase in the short-term with the addition of slash but that increase would be reduced by slash treatments identified in design criteria. Following treatment, winter snow loads on remaining slash would further reduce slash depth. Increased, long-term fuel loading as a result of falling trees within the units would be avoided as a result of harvesting dead, infested and susceptible trees.

Reducing stand densities in regenerated stands would reduce competition for sunlight, water, and nutrients, resulting in increased vigor of remaining trees. Removing trees with dwarf mistletoe would improve the health of the stands. Treating units of mature beetle-killed timber adjacent to regenerated units would help protect remaining young trees on these sites from potential fires.

Under the No Action Alternative, and absent a period of prolonged and severe low temperatures (< 30 degrees F), preferably with low snow depths, the beetle epidemic is likely to continue. Currently, most areas in the sanitation harvest units are in the older dead or red-needle stage. Green trees exist, mainly where commercial thinning occurred in the late 1980's or in areas with smaller diameter trees, For areas that remain in the red-needle stage, the potential for a ground fire to transition to a crown fire and move through the canopy, is greater than normal. This is primarily due to the lower moisture content of the red needles and small branches. Areas of older dead are less susceptible to crown fire once they have lost most of their needles and some of the finer branches. Should a fire occur during this time, it would likely be a ground fire with areas of crowning. Seed in serotinous cones would be released, regenerating the site.

If a fire doesn't occur during this time period, mortality would continue. Needle cast, generally occurring 1-5 years after infestation, would continue to occur, allowing more sunlight to reach the ground. Live understory trees would increase in growth and there would be an increase in ground vegetation. Limbs and cones would begin to fall off and some regeneration of the site may occur if cones fall on a favorable site and release seed. Lodgepole pine is a shade intolerant species and successful regeneration of the stand generally requires exposure of the site to sunlight and sufficient exposed mineral soil. Where aspen exists, there would likely be an increase in aspen sprouting. Increased ground vegetation and duff layers may inhibit regeneration of lodgepole pine. If regeneration is severely inhibited, the site may change to more of a grass/forb type. Although there is little or no crown fire potential during this stage, surface fuel loading would increase and there would likely be a subsequent increase in surface fire intensity should an ignition occur.

As time passes, more of the seed source would be on the ground, seed viability would begin to be compromised, and dead trees would begin to fall. A published literature review indicates that

trees killed by mountain pine beetle in previously unmanaged stands begin falling approximately 5 years after death and most dead trees are on the ground within 14 years (Lewis and Hartley, 2006). Fuel loading would increase dramatically with any regenerating seedlings and existing understory trees growing up through the fallen trees. Decay of beetle-killed pine is not really a factor in utilization until the trees fall over, and then decay accelerates. Further regeneration of the site would likely be impeded by the loss of seed source and lack of favorable sites. A fire at this time would likely result in soil sterilization, total loss of any existing regeneration, loss of any remaining seed source, and loss of adjacent regenerated stands.

Mitigation: none

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for plant and animal communities (partial, see also Wildlife, Aquatic and Wildlife, Terrestrial): In 2002 the rangeland vegetation within grazing allotment 07014 and 07015 were assessed for Colorado Standards for Public Land Health. The proposed action falls within both grazing allotments. It was determined at that time that the rangeland vegetation standard was being met. The Proposed Action would not affect the area's ability to meet the standard.

WILDLIFE, TERRESTRIAL (includes a finding on Standard 3)

Affected Environment: The proposed project area provides coniferous habitat for a variety of birds and mammals. Rocky Mountain elk, mule deer, moose, and black bears are found in the project area during various times of the year. During the winter, elk use the area and it is identified as both severe winter range and a winter concentration area by the Colorado Division of Wildlife. The proposed project falls within 8,200 acres of winter concentration and 42,000 acres of severe winter range. In addition, deer fawning and elk calving occur within the project area. Small mammals, including pine squirrels and pine marten, inhabit the area on a yearlong basis.

The project area lacks a sufficient vegetative understory to support a high number of large and small wild animals. The closed canopy, characteristic of the old-age lodgepole stands in the area, has blocked understory growth to the extent that vegetation is virtually non-existent and sparse in the areas proposed for timber harvest.

Environmental Consequences: Wildlife species using the project area would likely be temporarily displaced during timber harvest activities, especially during winter when animals are more concentrated and food is scarce. However, these animals would use adjacent undisturbed habitat and return to the project area following completion of harvest. Impacts to elk during winter and calving have been reduced by concentrating activities within 300 acres. The proposed project would benefit wildlife in the area by opening the closed forest canopy which would facilitate understory vegetation by allowing sunlight and moisture to reach the ground. A substantial increase in ground vegetation is anticipated after timber harvest, resulting in more cover and food for ground dwelling birds and mammals.

The No Action Alternative would not change the structure of the vegetation in the project area and would make the area more susceptible to a large-scale wildfire because lodgepole would continue to die. This could result in a long-term change in habitat on a large scale, which for the short term would be detrimental to most species dependent on lodgepole pine forest. With no

action, ground vegetation would continue to decrease in the closed lodgepole canopy. Wildlife use of the area could decrease since less cover and food would be available.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for plant and animal communities (partial, see also Vegetation and Wildlife, Aquatic): Currently, the area is meeting land health standards. The Proposed Action would not hinder the area's ability to continue to meet Standard 3. Under the No Action Alternative, there is an increased potential for wildfire, which may affect the standard depending upon its severity and extent.

RECREATION

Affected Environment: The Proposed Action is within Independence Mountain which is part of the Extensive Recreation Management Area (ERMA). Under the 1984 Resource Management Plan, ERMAs are managed to provide visitor information, minimal facility development and site maintenance, dispersed recreation opportunities and public land access. Within Independence Mountain, several recreational activities take place including Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) use, driving for pleasure, snowmobiling, hunting, camping, hiking, and wildlife watching. Currently there is a permitted big game outfitter who is authorized to set a base camp within a 3/4 mile of the proposed operations.

Environmental Consequences: Under the Proposed Action recreational activities that would be affected the greatest would be hunting, and OHV use. There is the potential for direct impacts to occur to hunters in the form of wildlife disturbance and displacement during harvesting operations. Additionally, existing routes in Unit 14 would impact OHV and camping opportunities limiting motorized access within the area.

Mitigation: None

ACCESS/TRANSPORTATION

Affected Environment: Within the project area, there are several existing two-track roads that are currently open for all modes of travel and the Parson's Draw Road No. 2513 that is closed year round to motorized travel.

Environmental Consequences/Mitigation: Under the Proposed Action, all timber roads with the exception of Parson's Draw Road No.2513 would be built as temporary roads for access to the project area. The project area is within an area that receives moderate-to-heavy OHV use, with increased use during the combined hunting seasons. Route proliferation and resource damage from OHV's has been an ongoing issue throughout the year in the Independence Mountain area.

Under the No Action Alternative, there would be no direct impacts to the transportation network. Travel would continue to occur on existing routes throughout the project area.

Mitigation: none

CUMULATIVE IMPACTS SUMMARY: For the purpose of this EA, the general geographic boundary for cumulative impact analysis is the Independence Mountain area. In looking at past actions within the geographic area over the past ten years, there have not been any major changes to the Independence Mountain area, with the exception of the extent and severity of the mountain pine beetle epidemic.

In looking at reasonably foreseeable actions (i.e. next 10 years) the BLM has approved a categorical exclusion (CO-120-2007-19-CX) for fuels treatments on a total project area of approximately 4,120 acres within the geographic area. Approximately 3,000 acres would be treated with prescribed burning and 1,000 acres would be treated using mechanical or hand thinning. In addition, The Fischer Draw Salvage Sale Environmental Assessment (CO-120-2007-46-EA), that proposed to conduct timber sale operations on approximately 135 acres of beetle-infested lodgepole pine stands, was signed on August 25, 2008. Planning for additional salvage sales and thinnings, along with associated activities, within the geographic area is in preliminary stages.

There is a potential that these activities, when added together, could have a short term cumulative impact on the vegetation and soils within the Independence Mountain area due to the amount of disturbance and vegetation removal resulting from the Proposed Action and future actions. However, these actions would have long-term beneficial impacts to wildlife and vegetation by facilitating stand regeneration, improving the health of residual trees and removing hazardous fuels. It should also be noted that the No Action Alternative could have negative short and long-term cumulative impacts on vegetation and soils, especially in the event of catastrophic fire.

PERSONS / AGENCIES CONSULTED: Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW) and Jackson County. A news release was published in the Regional Briefs section of the August 6, 2009 edition of the Jackson County Star. The BLM received 3 phone calls responding to the news release and 1 e-mail. No new issues were identified through scoping (see project file). See Appendix 2 for Tribal List.

INTERDISCIPLINARY REVIEW: See IDT-RRC in Appendix 1.

FONSI

DOI-BLM-CO-120-2009-0058-EA

Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts contained in the attached environmental assessment, and considering the significance criteria in 40 CFR 1508.27, I have determined that the Proposed Action will not have a significant effect on the human environment. An environmental impact statement is therefore not required.

DECISION RECORD

DECISION: It is my decision to authorize the Proposed Action as described in the attached EA.

"This decision is contingent on meeting all mitigation measures and monitoring requirements listed below."

RATIONALE: The decision was made to actively address the Mountain Pine Beetle (MPB) infestation and its associated impacts that are occurring on BLM-administered public lands, and to reduce stand densities in regenerated stands. The Proposed Action would remove dead, infested, and beetle-susceptible trees, thereby facilitating the regeneration of the sanitation harvest units while at the same time reducing hazardous fuels. Reducing stand densities and disease occurrence in existing regenerated stands would improve the health and vigor in young regenerated stands.

MITIGATION MEASURES:

Threatened, Endangered and Sensitive Species:

If an active goshawk nest is located within the project area, an eighth mile buffer around the nest site would be required.

Soils

Vehicle and equipment avoidance of slopes greater than 25% and ceasing their operations during wet soil conditions will help protect soil resources.

COMPLIANCE/MONITORING: The BLM would monitor disturbed areas for noxious weeds for two growing seasons after the project is completed. Noxious weed control, if needed, would be coordinated by the BLM.

NAME OF PREPARER: Kenneth W. Belcher

NAME OF ENVIRONMENTAL COORDINATOR: Peter McFadden

DATE: 9/10/09

SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL: Peter McFadden

DATE SIGNED: 9/10/09

ATTACHMENTS:

1) Visual Simulations

APPENDICES:

Appendix 1 – Interdisciplinary Team Analysis Review Record and Checklist
Appendix 2 – Native American Tribes

Appendix 1

INTERDISCIPLINARY TEAM ANALYSIS REVIEW RECORD AND CHECKLIST:

Project Title: Parsons Draw Sanitation Harvest & Pre-Commercial Thinning
Project Leader: Kenneth W. Belcher
Date Submitted for Comment: 08/03/2009
Due Date for Comments: 08/31/2009

Consultation/Permit Requirements:

Consultation	Date Initiated	Date Completed	Responsible Specialist/ Contractor	Comments
Cultural/Archeological Clearance/SHPO	8/17/2009	8/17/2009	B. Wyatt	See analysis above.
Native American	11/16/2007	8/17/2009	B. Wyatt	To date no tribe has identified and area of traditional spiritual concern.
T&E Species/FWS	N/A	N/A	M. McGuire	
Permits Needed (i.e. Air or Water)			P. Belcher	Burn permits will be acquired from the state prior to burning any slash piles by the BLM fire staff. Permit conditions will be followed to protect air quality.

(NP) = Not Present
(NI) = Resource/Use Present but Not Impacted
(PI) = Potentially Impacted and Brought Forward for Analysis.

NP NI PI	Discipline/Name	Date Review Comp.	Initials	**Review Comments** (required for Critical Element NIs, and for elements that require a finding but are not carried forward for analysis.)
CRITICAL ELEMENTS				
NI	Air Quality **Belcher**	8/20/09	PB	The Proposed Action includes burning of slash piles, which requires a state permit. All conditions of the permit will be followed to prevent air quality impacts.
NP	Areas of Critical Environmental Concern **Cassel**	8/11/2009	SC	There are no Areas of Critical Environmental Concern in the proximity of the proposed project area.
NI	Cultural Resources **Wyatt**	8/17/2009	BBW	See analysis section.
NP	Environmental Justice **Cassel**	8/11/2009	SC	According to the most recent Census Bureau statistics (2000), there are no minority or low income communities within the Kremmling Planning Area.
NP	Farmlands, Prime and Unique **Belcher**	8/21/09	PB	There are no farmlands, prime or unique, in the proximity of the proposed project area.
NP	Floodplains **Belcher**	8/21/09	PB	The units are in the uplands and would not affect the floodplain or increase the flood hazard.
PI	Invasive, Non-native Species **Johnson** Hughes	08/05/09	ZH	See Invasive Section
PI	Migratory Birds **McGuire**	8/18/2009	MM	See analysis.

PI	Native American Religious Concerns **Wyatt**	8/17/2009	BBW	To date no tribe has identified and area of traditional spiritual concern.
PI	T/E, and Sensitive Species (Finding on Standard 4) **McGuire**	8/18/2009	MM	See analysis.
NP	Wastes, Hazardous and Solid **Hodgson**	9/3/09	KH	There are no quantities of wastes, hazardous or solid, located on BLM-administered lands in the proposed project area, and there would be no wastes generated as a result of the Proposed Action or No Action alternative.
PI	Water Quality, Surface and Ground (Finding on Standard 5) **Belcher**	8/21/09	PB	The Water Quality section contains some of the review that explains why no impacts are expected.
NI	Wetlands & Riparian Zones (Finding on Standard 2) **Belcher**	8/21/09	PB	The Proposed Units have only one seep identified within the boundaries. The seep has not been inventoried for wetland species and appears to be discontinuous (is not a spring that continues to a drainage). The design feature of a 100 ft. buffer eliminates any impacts to the area.
NP	Wild and Scenic Rivers **Windsor**	8/24/09	AW	There are no eligible Wild and Scenic River segments in the proposed project area.
NP	Wilderness **Windsor**	8/24/09	AW	There is no designated Wilderness or Wilderness Study Areas in the proximity of the proposed project area.
NON-CRITICAL ELEMENTS (A finding must be made for these elements)				
PI	Soils (Finding on Standard 1) **Belcher**	9/4/09	PB	See the Soils Section in the Environmental Assessment.
PI	Vegetation (Finding on Standard 3) **Johnson Torma**	9/4/2009	PT	No impacts to native rangeland vegetation due to transition from grass to timber however there are impacts to timber (See vegetation section)
NP	Wildlife, Aquatic (Finding on Standard 3) **McGuire**	8/18/2009	MM	No aquatic wildlife present in the proposed project area.
PI	Wildlife, Terrestrial (Finding on Standard 3) **McGuire**	8/18/2009	MM	See analysis.
OTHER NON-CRITICAL ELEMENTS				
PI	Access/Transportation **Monkouski**	9/3/2009	JJM	See Analysis.
PI	Forest Management **K. Belcher**	8/3/2009	KB	See Analysis under Vegetation.
NI	Geology and Minerals **Hodgson**	9/3/09	KH	No impacts.
NI	Fire **Wyatt**	8/17/2009	BBW	There is a potential for wildfire from mufflers or vehicles hitting rocks. All vehicles should carry as a minimum a shovel, a class A-B-C fire extinguisher with a minimum of one pound of retardant, or a container with a minimum of 5 gallons of water, in the event of an accidental start. Slash pile burning would take place during winter months.
NI	Hydrology/Water Rights **Belcher**	9/4/09	PB	There are no impacts to water rights from the Proposed Action. See Water Quality and Soil Sections for discussions pertaining to the hydrology.
NP	Paleontology **Rupp**	8/11/2009	FGR	No geologic structures are present that are sensitive for fossil resources..
NI	Noise **Monkouski**	9/3/2009	JJM	Minor short term noise would occur during operations. There are currently other entities permitted for post and pole cutting.
NI	Range Management **Johnson Torma**	7/4/2009	PT	Livestock use would not be impacted by the proposed action or no action alternative

NP	Lands/ Realty Authorizations **Cassel**	8/11/2009	SC	There are no leases, permits or ROW in the location of the proposed action.
PI	Recreation **Monkouski Windsor**	9/3/2009	JJM	See Analysis.
NI	Socio-Economics **Cassel**	8/11/2009	SC	If this contract was contracted through the N.P. Stewardship agreement, the contractor would likely be from the local area which may help the economy of N.P. If not through the stewardship, a non-local contractor may or may not be hired. Not a big enough job to be an impact on the socio-economics of the area.
NI	Visual Resources **Windsor**	8/24/09	AW	The proposed project is within a Visual Resource Inventory (VRI) Class II area. The project would repeat the elements of color and line in the surrounding natural landscape. The area proposed for thinning will maintain its current shape and color, since trees will be left uncut. Only a small part of the area proposed for timber harvest will be visible from Hwy 125. (see attached visual simulation) The area proposed for timber would create a new open area that would repeat the open areas in the surrounding landscape. The level of change to the existing landscape from the proposed action would be low and would not attract the attention of the casual viewer. The no action alternative would not change the landscape and therefore would have no impact to visual resources.
PI	Cumulative Impact Summary **Belcher**	9/4/09	KB	See above.
FINAL REVIEW				
	P&E Coordinator **McFadden**			

Appendix 2

NATIVE AMERICAN TRIBES CONTACTED:

Ivan Posey, Chairman
Shoshone Business Council
Shoshone Tribe
P O Box 538
Ft. Washakie, WY 82514

Mr. Norman Tidzump
Tribal Historic Preservation Officer
Shoshone Tribe, Cultural Center
P.O. Box 538
Fort Washakie, WY 82514

Ernest House, Sr., Chairman
Ute Mountain Ute Tribe
P O Box JJ
Towoac, CO 81334

Mr. Terry Knight, Sr., NAGPRA Representative
Ute Mountain Ute Tribe
P O Box 468
Towaoc, CO 81334

Harvey Spoonhunter, Chairman
Northern Arapaho Business Council
P O Box 328
Fort Washakie, WY 82514

THPO Director
Northern Arapaho Tribe
P O Box 396
Fort Washakie, WY 82514

Ernest House, Jr., Executive Secretary
Colorado Commissioner of Indian Affairs
130 State Capitol
Denver, Colorado 80203

Robert Goggles, NAGPRA Representative
Northern Arapaho Tribe
328 Seventeen Mile Road
Arapaho, WY 82510

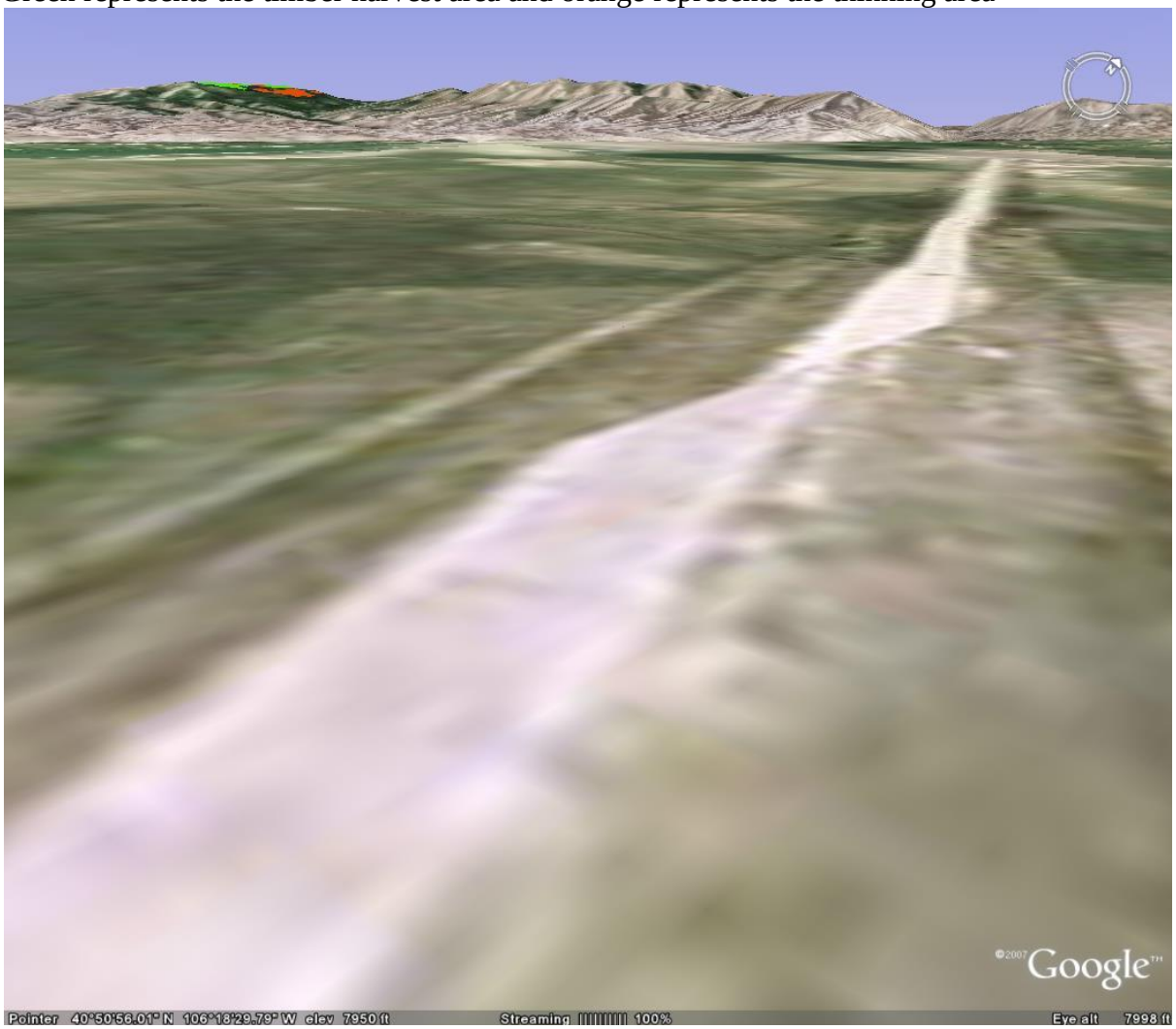
Mathew Box, Chairman
Southern Ute Indian Tribe
P O Box 737
Ignacio, CO 81137

Neil Cloud, NAGPRA Representative
Southern Ute Tribe
Mail Stop #73
Ignacio, CO 81137

Curtis Cesspooch, Chairman
Uintah & Ouray Tribal Business Committee
P O Box 190
Ft. Duchesne, UT 84026

Betsy Chapoose, Director
Cultural Rights & Protection Specialist
Uintah & Ouray Tribe
P O Box 190
Fort Duchesne, UT 84026

Visual Simulations:
Green represents the timber harvest area and orange represents the thinning area



Looking NW from Hwy 125 south of Cowdrey

Visual Simulations:
Green represents the timber harvest area and orange represents the thinning area

Looking W from junction of Hwy 125 and Jackson County Rd 6E

Visual Simulations:
Green represents the timber harvest area and orange represents the thinning area

Looking SW from Hwy 125 north of Independence Mountain